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Riverside County Transportation Commission: Robin Lowe, Hemet

San Bernardino Associated Governments: Paul Leon

Ventura County Transportation Commission: Keith Millhouse, Moorpark

10/24/07

November 7, 2007

SUBJECT: RECIRCULATION OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION FOR THE PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the following project:

Regional Transportation Plan

SCAG previously circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on June 27, 2007 regarding the PEIR on both the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP). At that time, SCAG contemplated that a joint PEIR would be prepared regarding the RTP and the RCP, a voluntary, long-range regional visionary plan initiated by SCAG's governing body, the Regional Council.

The NOP is being recirculated due to a change in the description of the project, to address only the RTP, as described in the attached notice.

Potential significant impacts, as outlined in the attached notice, will be analyzed in the Draft PEIR. Written comments to SCAG regarding the NOP for this project will be received until December 10, 2007. SCAG anticipates releasing the Draft PEIR in January 2008.

All comments received in response to the previous June 27, 2007 NOP will remain part of the administrative record and be addressed in the Draft PEIR. Please submit any additional comments, concerns, recommendations on the RTP and other pertinent information that may enable us to prepare a comprehensive and meaningful PEIR for the project. It is requested that your comments be sent to:

Jessica Kirchner, Senior Regional Planner
SCAG
818 W. Seventh St., 12th Fl.
Los Angeles California 90017
kirchner@scag.ca.gov

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: INTERESTED AGENCIES AND INDIVIDUALS

**SUBJECT: RECIRCULATED NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A PROGRAM
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP)**

DATE: NOVEMBER 7, 2007

LEAD AGENCY:

Southern California Association of Governments
818 West Seventh Street, 12th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017-3435

**Project Title: Regional Transportation Plan (SCH Number
2007061126)**

The Southern California Association of Governments, as Lead Agency, is recirculating a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), a long-range transportation plan prepared to meet federal requirements under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act- A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

SCAG previously circulated a Notice of Preparation on June 27, 2007, regarding the PEIR on both the RTP and the Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP). At that time, SCAG contemplated that a joint PEIR would be prepared regarding the RTP and the RCP, a voluntary, long-range regional visionary plan initiated by SCAG's governing body, the Regional Council.

This NOP is being recirculated due to a change in the description of the project, to address only the RTP. On November 1, 2007, SCAG's Regional Council voted in favor of preparing two separate PEIRs, one for the RTP and one for the RCP. This Regional Council action was primarily based on the fact that the RTP is a federally mandated plan with a definitive schedule for its adoption, unlike the RCP which is a SCAG-initiated plan with no required deadline for adoption and is not specifically binding on SCAG's local jurisdictional members. The RCP covers a broad range of environmental issues raised by RCP policies which, in part, build off the findings developed as part of the 2008 RTP. This NOP pertains only to the RTP and is intended to obtain input into the scope and content of the environmental information that will be evaluated in

the PEIR regarding the RTP. The project location, description, and the expected scope of environmental analysis are attached on the following pages. A separate NOP for the RCP will be published.

As before, SCAG seeks input from local, state and federal public agencies on issues specific to the proposed project. All comments received in response to the previous June 27, 2007 NOP will remain part of the administrative record and be addressed in the Draft PEIR. Please submit any additional comments, concerns, recommendations on the RTP and other pertinent information that may enable SCAG to prepare a comprehensive and meaningful PEIR for the proposed project.

As specified by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please send your response to Jessica Kirchner, Senior Regional Planner, at the SCAG mailing address shown above or at Kirchner@scag.ca.gov, or visit our website at <http://www.scag.ca.gov>. Please include a return address and the name of a contact person in your agency. Please send your comments electronically if possible.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE 2008 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

PROJECT LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), is comprised of six counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura) and 186 cities in Southern California, and is the organization charged with addressing and resolving short-term and long-term regional policy issues. The SCAG region has more than 18 million residents and encompasses more than 38,000 square miles, representing the largest and most diverse region in the country.

SCAG's governing body, the Regional Council, is composed of over 70 elected officials representing cities and counties, tribal governments, the county transportation commissions, and subregional organizations throughout the region. In addition to the Regional Council, there are four committees: Administration Committee, Transportation and Communications Committee, Community, Economic and Human Development Committee, and Energy and Environment Committee. In addition to the four standing committees, there are various task forces, subcommittees and groups that address specific regional policies, technical planning, and air quality conformity issues.

SCAG is officially designated by federal law as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Southern California region. Additionally, under state law, SCAG is designated as a Council of Governments (COG) and a Multi-County Designated Transportation Planning Agency. As such SCAG has a number of formal authorities and responsibilities, including:

- Conducting comprehensive transportation planning and programming processes that result in a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). Together these documents serve as the legal basis for transportation decision-making in the region.
- Conducting a comprehensive environmental planning process, including a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the RTP and reviewing and assessing Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) for all projects of regional significance.
- Determining, pursuant to the Clean Air Act, the conformity of SCAG projects, plans, and programs to air quality requirements.
- Developing demographic projections and the integrated land use, housing, employment, and transportation programs, measures, and strategies portions of the South Coast Air Quality Management Plan.
- Conducting inter-governmental review of programs proposed for federal assistance.

Project Description

SCAG is preparing the 2008 RTP for the SCAG region. The RTP is the culmination of a multi-year effort with a focus on improving the balance between land use and transportation systems, both current and future. SCAG is required by federal law to create a RTP that determines the needs of the transportation system and prioritizes proposed transportation projects. The RTP is also necessary to obtain and allocate federal funding for regional transportation projects. Under new federal laws as contained in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act— a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the RTP must be comprehensively updated once every four years (previously the plan has been updated every three years; SAFETEA-LU extended the update period to four years) to ensure that the plan adequately addresses future travel needs and is consistent with the federal Clean Air Act. SCAG does not implement individual projects in the RTP; these projects will be implemented by agencies other than SCAG.

The RTP is a compendium of policies, strategies, and projects that serve as the transportation action plan for the SCAG region. The 2008 RTP is a multi-modal plan representing a vision for a better transportation system, integrated with the best possible growth pattern for the region over the plan horizon of 2035. The plan provides the basic policy and program framework for long term investment in our vast regional transportation system in a coordinated, cooperative and continuous manner.

SCAG develops the RTP in coordination and consultation with the county transportation commissions, subregional organizations, transit operators and other stakeholders. To ensure a balanced, multi-modal plan that meets regional as well as county-specific goals, SCAG integrates the planning activities of each of the counties in the region.

SAFETEA-LU modified existing state and federal MPO transportation planning processes. Specifically, SAFETEA-LU requires that “a long-range transportation plan shall include a discussion of the types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that may have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the plan.” As a result of these new planning requirements, SCAG conducted expanded consultation associated with the 2004 RTP PEIR mitigation measures as part of its “Gap Analysis,” adopted in March 2007. As a result of this consultation process, mitigation measures have been refined since the 2004 RTP. These changes were made based on review and input from federal, state, and tribal land management, wildlife and regulatory agencies. Consultation activities will continue as part of the 2008 RTP and PEIR development processes, as required under SAFETEA-LU.

Additional new requirements under SAFETEA-LU include:

- Developing in consultation with all interested parties, an expanded public participation plan to provide interested parties with reasonable opportunities for involvement in the metropolitan planning and programming processes.
- Consulting with state and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation.
- Adding the phrase “promote consistency of transportation plan and transportation improvements with state and local planned growth and economic development patterns” to the environmental planning factor.

SCAG is coordinating efforts to comply with the new SAFETEA-LU planning requirements described above with efforts undertaken through the CEQA process. As such, particular emphasis in the RTP will be placed on these new planning requirements, including those that prescribe coordinated planning and consideration of environmental resources.

RTP Goals

The goals of the 2008 RTP have expanded from 2004 to encompass an additional goal regarding addressing transportation security. These seven goals are in no particular order and demonstrate the need to balance many priorities in the most-cost effective manner.

- Maximize mobility and accessibility for all people and goods in the region;
- Ensure travel safety and reliability for the people and goods in the region;
- Preserve and ensure a sustainable regional transportation system;
- Maximize the security of the regional transportation system through improved monitoring, recovery planning, and coordination with other security agencies;
- Maximize the productivity of our transportation system;
- Protect the environment, improve air quality and promote energy efficiency; and
- Encourage land use and growth patterns that complement our transportation investments.

The 2008 RTP will focus on system monitoring and evaluation, recognizing that maintaining and/or improving mobility will no longer depend solely on expanding the transportation system. Given the region’s fiscal constraints, an integrated approach is needed to maximize mobility. As such, the 2008 RTP priorities are as follows:

1. System monitoring and evaluation
2. Maintenance and preservation

3. Smart land use/demand management/value pricing
4. Intelligent transportation systems/traveler information/traffic control incident management
5. Operational improvements
6. System completion and expansion

Federal planning and conformity rules require that a conforming RTP be financially constrained. It must demonstrate that all projects identified in the constrained plan have an adequate funding source reasonably available throughout the period of time that is required to complete the project. A conforming RTP cannot simply state a wish list of projects.

At the core of the plan is the RTIP, which not only represents the first six years of the plan, but also represents current commitments. Every project that seeks federal, state or local funding for implementation must be included in the RTIP. The ring outside of the core represents the fiscally constrained plan that will be used to demonstrate transportation conformity. These projects can be reasonably funded within the planning horizon of the RTP. The outer ring, called the strategic plan, represents projects of merit that should be considered for funding in the future as it becomes available, but that currently do not have sufficient funding or regional commitment. However, the compendium of projects, policies and programs that make up the core and the strategic plan together comprise the 2008 RTP that will be adopted by the Regional Council. The 2008 RTP includes a comprehensive strategy of policies and projects including the following:

- High-Speed Regional Transport (HSRT) – high speed, high performance regional transport system connecting the region's ports, airports and urban activity centers;
- Goods Movement – freight rail investments, HSRT for freight, highway investments such as user supported (toll) dedicated truck lanes;
- Aviation - improved ground access, FlyAway improvement and expansion;
- Transit – heavy and light rail, bus rapid transit (BRT);
- Highway Improvements – HOV lanes and connectors, mixed flow or general purpose lanes, toll facilities and HOT lanes; and,
- Intelligent Transportation Systems.

This list is a general representation of the types of projects that are anticipated to be included in the 2008 RTP and is by no means exhaustive. Individual projects are still under consideration for inclusion into the RTP.

PRELIMINARY PLAN ALTERNATIVES

It is anticipated that the 2008 RTP PEIR will evaluate at least three (3) Plan Alternatives. Each Alternative, except the No Project Alternative, will include a wide range of policies and projects including, but not limited to variations in land use density and intensity, aviation, bus routes, freight rail, high-speed passenger rail, highway/roadway construction and widening, and passenger rail construction.

SCAG has the discretion to select an Alternative in its entirety or to combine elements of various Alternatives to develop the final Alternative selected for the RTP and PEIR. Initial Alternatives include:

NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

The No Project Alternative consists of all major projects that are reasonably foreseeable and reasonably expected to go forward without the 2008 RTP, including all projects that have already received funding, are scheduled to receive funding, and/or have received environmental clearance by December 2006. The No Project Alternative will assume that no safety-related maintenance would be deferred, but the overall appearance and function of the transportation system would be expected to deteriorate.

ENVISION

Envision will explore land use and transportation policies designed to further sustainability objectives including reduced consumption of resources, particularly energy resources and with a focus on reducing emissions of Greenhouse Gases in accordance with AB 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. Envision also includes increased housing density around transit centers and an overall reduction in single family housing throughout the region.

MODIFIED 2004 RTP

The Modified 2004 RTP Alternative will include the policies and projects from the 2004 RTP, updated with more recent population information. This alternative will likely represent the “Core” RTP, that is, a vision for addressing the region’s transportation needs, within the constraints of reasonably available revenue sources.

SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and *CEQA Guidelines* require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for any discretionary government action, including programs and plans that may cause significant environmental effects. Specifically, RTP necessitates preparation of a PEIR, which is a “first-tier” CEQA document designed to consider “broad policy alternatives and programwide mitigation measures” (*CEQA Guidelines* §15168). The programmatic environmental analysis for the PEIR will evaluate environmental effects, such as direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts, and will include mitigation measures to offset any identified potentially significant adverse environmental effects. In addition, the PEIR will supply the foundation for the subsequent, site-specific environmental reviews that will be conducted by implementation agencies, as projects in the RTP are developed (*CEQA Guidelines* §15385).

In addition to fulfilling legal requirements, the RTP PEIR will provide an opportunity to inform decision-makers and the public about potential environmental effects associated with the implementation of the RTP and Alternatives. This environmental analysis will ultimately support the selection of

the Preferred Alternative, and will provide a useful regional-scale environmental planning tool to help local agencies evaluate and reduce cumulative environmental effects.

The PEIR will evaluate the environmental effects of implementing the projects, programs and plans in the 2008 RTP. The following describes the potential environmental impacts that will be discussed in the PEIR. In each case, the analysis is completed by comparing existing conditions to conditions in 2035 with the Plan.

Aesthetics and Views

Much of the SCAG region is currently rural and largely uninhabited. The PEIR will evaluate the visual effects associated with developing transportation projects and infrastructure as proposed in the RTP, including obstructing views from scenic highways.

Air Quality

Transportation projects contribute significantly to the poor air quality in many parts of the region. The transportation section alone is responsible for an estimated 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions.¹ The PEIR will evaluate greenhouse gas emission in the region and also evaluate criteria pollutants by county and air basin.

Biological Resources

The PEIR will evaluate the project's impact on sensitive habitats in the region. It is anticipated that some sensitive areas (wetlands, natural vegetation, etc.) would be disturbed by projects proposed in the 2008 RTP.

Cultural Resources

Excavation and grading activities associated with implementation of 2008 RTP projects could disturb previously unidentified historical or paleontological resources. The PEIR will evaluate potential effects of the 2008 RTP on such resources.

Energy

Petroleum and natural gas supply much of the energy consumed in California. Implementation of plan projects could further increase auto dependent development, thereby increasing gasoline and petroleum consumption in the region. The PEIR will evaluate energy impacts associated with implementation of the 2008 RTP.

¹ United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. Transportation and Global Climate Change: A Review and Analysis of the Literature. (June 1998). DOT-T-97-03.

Geology and Soils

The PEIR will evaluate whether implementation of the Plan will result in adverse effects on the environment such as erosions, landslides or other forms of ground failure.

Hazardous Materials

The RTP is anticipated to increase the amount of lane miles in the region and result in an increase in truck trips, a common mode of hazardous materials transport. The PEIR for the Plan will evaluate whether implementation of the Plan could result in an increase risk of accident or upset due to the release of hazardous materials into the environment.

Land Use

The 2008 RTP will include transportation projects and strategies to distribute future growth in the region. The PEIR will evaluate whether these strategies would result in an adverse impact.

Noise

Highway noise is often dependent on a number of factors including traffic volume, vehicle speed, fleet mix (cars, trucks, etc) and location relative to sensitive receptors such as residences. The PEIR will evaluate the effects of increases in noise levels that could result from implementation of the 2008 RTP.

Open Space

The 2008 RTP is expected to increase urbanization in the region, potentially resulting in a loss of habitat, parks and agricultural lands. The PEIR will evaluate impacts that could occur to open space in the region as a result of implementing the 2008 RTP.

Population, Employment, and Housing

Transportation facilitates and associated infrastructure developed as part of the 2008 RTP have the potential to induce population growth in some areas, and divide communities in others. The PEIR will evaluate these impacts.

Public Service and Utilities

The increase in population anticipated over the lifetime of the RTP (30 years) would result in an increase in demand on public services. The PEIR will evaluate changes to the environment that may occur from expansion of such services.

Transportation

Although the Plan includes strategies to reduce congestion and delay in the region, increases in population over the lifetime of the plan could still cause there to be increases in vehicle miles traveled and average delay. The PEIR will evaluate these issues.

Security

The PEIR will evaluate the potential exposure upon people or property to security risks resulting from the Plan.

Water Resources

Construction of impervious surfaces such as roadways, parking and other transportation infrastructure could alter drainage patterns and the quality of stormwater runoff. The PEIR will evaluate the potential effects of the plan on the region's water quality.

Construction Impacts

The PEIR will evaluate construction related impacts, including potential traffic, air and noise effects from construction vehicles.

Cumulative Impacts

The PEIR will examine the cumulative impacts of urban development and growth that would be accommodated by the transportation investments in the 2008 RTP.

SUMMARY

This NOP is the official notice of a 30 day comment period and is being recirculated due to a change in the description of the project to address only the RTP. All comments received in response to the previous June 27, 2007 NOP will remain part of the administrative record and be addressed in the Draft PEIR. Please submit any additional comments, concerns, recommendations on the RTP and other pertinent information that may enable us to prepare a comprehensive and meaningful PEIR for the project.

It is requested that your comments be sent to:

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